
INTRODUCTION

Development of the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium and This Book

Sharon McKay

The chapters in this book represent a selection of some of the excellent presentations made at the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium's third bi-annual symposium, held in Edmonton, Alberta, November 23–25, 2005. The book is made possible through the support provided by the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, administered through the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. But the preparation of such a book is only possible because of the quite recent emergence and subsequent work of the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium (PCWC). I am pleased to share below some highlights of the short history of the PCWC, particularly because they illustrate not only the practical, but more importantly, the philosophical development of the organization. Readers will find that this philosophy informs a great deal of the writing in the 11 chapters that make up *Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare: Voices from the Prairies*.

Behind the scenes at the symposium and in much of the work of the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium are many faces that represent its key constituents. The PCWC is an informal, unfunded, inter-

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provincial and northern multi-sector network. Members of the Consortium are dedicated to advancing and strengthening child welfare education and training, research, policy development, practice, and service delivery in the Prairie provinces and the Northwest Territories.

This introduction tells the story of the truly humble beginning of the Consortium, which emerged from the faltering first steps of a small group of social work educators, service delivery agents, and policy-makers exploring ways to collaborate in the field of child welfare. From the time of these first steps, the development of the PCWC has been powerfully and fundamentally influenced by the urgent voices of Aboriginal people deeply concerned with the escalating numbers of their children and youth in the care of the State. Expressed strongly and clearly at the Consortium's first symposium, held in Saskatoon in November, 2001, these voices resulted in a *volte face*, or immediate turn-about, in how the event was proceeding. The decisions made at the time had the effect of pulling our fledgling group together with an even greater sense of commitment and resolve. The story of "honouring the voices" is worth telling, for there are lessons to be learned and potentially, a model for collaborative work between sectors integral to child, youth, and family well-being that could be adapted in other parts of Canada.

THE FIRST MEETING: DECEMBER 1999

Prompted by concerns echoing throughout the academic and practice communities of social work about the state of child welfare in Canada, a group of academics from the four Prairie-based university programs in social work met in December 1999 at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in Saskatoon to explore ways and means of working together to strengthen university preparation for the field. This meeting was attended by the four program heads and three faculty experts from the University of Regina, Faculty of Social Work; First Nations University of Canada (then the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College—SIFC), School of Indian Social Work; University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work; and the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work.¹

In addition to the shared commitment to the field of child welfare,

the meeting was stimulated by extreme budget cuts in all four programs, making the potential for collaboration appear attractive and, to some degree, necessary. Information shared in the meeting included current and planned curriculum initiatives, current research, central issues in the field, structural changes in service delivery, and the structure and delivery of Aboriginal child welfare in the three Prairie provinces. The ensuing discussion led to four outcomes:

- an agreement to draft a Memorandum of Understanding, entitled the Prairie Child Welfare Initiative (PCWI);
- an agreement to submit a Letter of Intent to Health Canada for a proposal to develop a Prairie Centre of Excellence on Child Welfare;
- an agreement to engage government ministries and Aboriginal service deliverers in a larger discussion of potential collaboration with the schools; and
- an agreement to pursue collaborative research.

In the following two months, a great deal of effort was put into the Letter of Intent, which subsequently was not funded. This pursuit side-tracked the group as the energy and time spent on this work served to waylay action on other objectives. It was not until November, 2000 that the PCWI Memorandum of Understanding was officially signed by senior university officials in the four institutions. Action on a proposed meeting with government ministries and Aboriginal service deliverers did not begin until December, 2000.

ENGAGING GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND ABORIGINAL SERVICE DELIVERERS

The idea agreed to by the PCWI was that a Prairie Child Welfare symposium should be held, dedicated to the development of a collaborative, tri-provincial action plan on a number of fronts. If this were to be successful, key government and Aboriginal representatives would have to buy into the idea. A strategic step to this engagement was to invite a representative group to a symposium planning meeting on June 4–5, 2001. Signaling that Aboriginal perspectives would be integral to the symposium, the meeting was again located at

the SIFC social work offices in Saskatoon.

Twelve people from the university, government, and First Nations child and family services sectors attended this meeting. A number of items were discussed: policy and service delivery issues, community capacity building, issues related to education and training, the potential for collaborative research, and Aboriginal child and family service issues. All participants supported the idea of a working symposium to be scheduled in the fall of 2001. Aboriginal participants at the meeting cautioned that the original title (Prairie Child Welfare Symposium) might not draw in a large number of Aboriginal people, as there were too many negative associations with the term *child welfare*. In order to encourage Aboriginal participation, participants agreed that Aboriginal voices should be built into all aspects of the program, and the event should be held in the SIFC facility in Saskatoon. The theme chosen for the symposium was “Honouring the Voices.”

The PCWI was committed to the notion of a working symposium and thus, limited attendance. Thirty key leaders from each province would be invited, representing education, government ministries, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service delivery. A symposium steering committee was organized, and the first conference call scheduled for June 19, 2001.²

PLANNING THE FIRST SYMPOSIUM

Amazingly, with the exception of "on the ground" details handled by the School of Indian Social Work, planning for the first symposium occurred entirely by e-mail and conference calls. Decisions made by these means included establishing a budget, raising funds, preparing the symposium invitation, developing a program, and selecting and recruiting appropriate speakers. Louise McCallum, competent and enthusiastic Administrative Assistant for the SIFC program, was freed up to assist with the details. This assistance was enormously helpful to the task of ensuring that all on-site arrangements would be in place—that necessary equipment and room accommodations could be made available at the College, that hotel space would be available in Saskatoon, and that entertainment and numerous other items would be organized.

A primary objective of the steering committee was to organize the symposium in such a way that participants would be sufficiently informed and stimulated to move easily into working groups late in the afternoon of Day One, and again on the morning of Day Two. The work to be done in these groups would be the core of the symposium—the drafting of a tri-provincial plan of action on several levels. Achieving this end, while at the same time ensuring that key topics were addressed prior to the working group sessions, meant that the agenda would have to be especially tight and well-focussed. Fortunately for the planning group, Alberta Children's Services loaned the services of Alan Shugg, senior consultant and professional facilitator. Shugg was especially helpful with the design of questions to be used for group discussion on Day One and those that would serve as a guide for working groups on Day Two.

THE SYMPOSIUM: DAY ONE

One hundred and thirty-one participants registered for the symposium, which was held on November 16–17, 2001. This number included three participants from the Northwest Territories, two from British Columbia, and one from Ontario. The event proceeded as planned—drumming by the Saskatoon-based Wanuskewin Drum Group, an opening prayer by SIFC Elder Danny Musqua, and welcoming remarks from the respective Deans and Academic Vice-President from SIFC and the University of Regina. Dr. Jean Lafrance of the University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work delivered the keynote address entitled, "The Social and Economic Context of Prairie Child Welfare." The first indication that all might not go as planned emerged in the response to the Lafrance address. A group of Aboriginal leaders were to have been invited to respond to the keynote address, which would be given to them a few days ahead of the symposium. However, a miscommunication occurred and the invitations had not been issued. Consequently, volunteer speakers were called for and several individuals agreed to comment spontaneously. For some of these participants, the keynote speech had evoked sadness and memories of difficult personal times. Others found it offensive to hear a non-Aboriginal man "tell us what we already know." Tension was high and steering committee members

greeted the lunch break that followed with some relief.

Two panel presentations followed lunch. The themes were: “The Changing Policy/Practice Environment” and “Changing Needs and Directions for Education, Training and Research.” Each panel included representatives from education, government, and Aboriginal service deliverers. The panel chairs and the panel members were each notable for their accomplishments in the field and their presentations were well received. Following the panels, participants broke into discussion groups. Pre-selected facilitators and recorders took careful notes of the process.

An Unanticipated Crisis

At the end of Day One, several recorders from the nine discussion groups reported their concerns that, contrary to the theme of the symposium, Aboriginal voices were not being heard. This led to a planning crisis—how to respond, what to do? On the advice of our Aboriginal members, the planning committee decided that the agenda for Day Two would have to be substantially revised so that a full participant sharing circle could take place. Four planned presentations would need to be delayed, an Elder would need to be contacted, and physical arrangements for the circle would need to be made. The working group discussions that were to take place on Day Two would have to be set aside. The steering committee had considered these to be integral to the development of a tri-provincial workplan. Nevertheless, it was clear to all that the integrity and commitment of the entire planning group would be forever compromised if an immediate intervention did not take place to ensure that all participants felt equally heard and their voices honoured and respected.

Jon Sealy, then director of the SFIC School of Indian Social Work, immediately offered to contact an Elder and look after physical arrangements for the circle. Sharon McKay, then dean of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina, undertook to contact the four individuals who would be asked to delay their presentations.

DAY TWO: THE SHARING CIRCLE

The sharing circle is an Aboriginal construct that can be used for information sharing, problem-solving, and for cultural and other purposes. Important to the process is a beginning prayer, led by an Elder, a circle formation, and a feather or other symbolic object to pass from person to person as people speak. Individuals holding the feather are free to say whatever comes to mind and to speak for as long as each feels is necessary. When the individual is ready, he or she passes the feather to the next person and the circle continues until all have said all that they wish to say. Often the feather will be passed around the circle several times—but never do people interrupt or argue with the speaker. All participants are expected to listen quietly and respectfully and wait for their turn to add to what has been said.

We were fortunate to be able to reach Elder Danny Musqua on the evening of Day One. He agreed to delay his own plans for the following morning so that he could speak to the group about the circle process and begin the proceedings with a prayer. Prior to his arrival, the planning group rearranged the gymnasium so that all of the chairs were set in one large circle. A microphone with a 50-foot cord was located. This object would be used in place of the symbolic feather.

People arrived and the morning began. One hundred and ten individuals took part in the circle, each having the opportunity to speak only once. The process took four and a half hours. The only interruption that occurred was to give instructions for lunch (five people at a time left the circle to pick up their lunch, returning quietly to the circle to eat their meal). Other than occasional slight rustling, the room was silent except for the person speaking into the microphone.

As the morning progressed, it became clear that the afternoon agenda items would have to be cancelled: a presentation by Marlyn Bennett of the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare's First Nations Research Site, and symposium highlights and observations from the perspective of three Aboriginal PhD candidates—Jeanine Carriere, University of Calgary; Deanna Greyeyes, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College; and Jackie Maurice, University of Regina. All four presenters were gracious about the turn of events, not one of them expressing disappointment even though they had each put considerable work into their personal contributions to the two-day event.

The symposium ended when the last participant had spoken. An Elder present in the room closed the circle with a prayer. This was followed by shaking of hands in traditional formation, and the symposium was formally over. A few thank-you's were called out as people left the room to travel home, many in a rush so as not to miss their flights. Most of the steering committee members parted at this point. The schedule had not included a final check-in with one another at the conclusion of the event. There were no final words, no plan of action, considerable emotion, and no forum in which to discuss next steps. A few hurried goodbyes were said, with suggestions that the steering committee hold a conference call in the near future to talk about what had happened and how we should move forward. Several participants in the room had called for a second symposium, shortly to follow this one.

ANALYZING WHAT WAS SAID

Three documents were prepared for the steering committee by facilitator Alan Shugg: a summary of reports from discussion groups on Day One; notes taken by various people during the sharing circle (anonymous observations and comments); and a report of participant evaluations, completed at the end of the day. Six themes emerged from the discussion groups:

- listen and respond to the wisdom of Aboriginal voices (continue the dialogue evident at the symposium)
- develop new partnerships
- take guidance from the community in establishing directions, policies, and service delivery approaches for social work
- think and act in new paradigms and move outside of the previous "boxes"
- change the basis and focus of legislation and policies
- revise how social workers are trained, attending to the Aboriginal perspective

These themes emerged from the wisdom that was spoken in the sharing circle. Many participants spoke from their hearts, describing their own experiences as children or parents dealing with the current child welfare system. The importance of personal caring relationships and of dealing with the "fragmentation of the spirit, heart, and health" was stressed. Community-based healing strategies were affirmed.

Participants commented that thinking and acting in new paradigms and moving outside of previous "boxes" required a sense of vision. This vision is articulated in new service structures emerging from Aboriginal communities. Service delivery models need to be shared across provincial boundaries, and within provincial ministries and schools of social work. By exchanging ideas and experiences around programs, all constituencies have an opportunity to learn from one another. The best of Aboriginal social work could be showcased.

Frustration with federal and provincial legislation and policies echoed through the sharing circle and group discussions. Aboriginal people spoke to the need for legislative change to support leadership in their own communities. Funding criteria are a serious roadblock and must become more flexible so that prevention programs can be designed and implemented. Social workers need to create spaces to hear voices and advance Aboriginal agendas.

Social work educators were challenged to become more relevant and accessible, and to partner and collaborate with service deliverers. Ongoing professional development linkages need to be made. Opportunities for community-driven research should be pursued and ensuring that there are "core" courses on Aboriginal issues is fundamental.

THE SYMPOSIUM EVALUATION

Four questions were asked on the symposium evaluation form. Responses were extremely positive. The questions and some representative responses are given below:

Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare

What were some of the things you learned at the symposium?

That many people have similar experiences and feelings about child welfare and diverse approaches to dealing with the issue. It was very affirming.

I learned so much: to be flexible, responsive, patient, build relationships, focus on healing the caregiver, focus on family, draw on traditional knowledge and practice, and trust the intent and the process.

There was a tremendous amount of knowledge in the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal people need to develop their own programs based on their culture to meet their needs. (I didn't really learn that, but had it affirmed). People care. We all want the same results, but are not quite sure on how to get them.

What did you find most useful about the symposium?

Participation of all, especially in the sharing circle [repeated in some form on most evaluations].

It helped me to look at my work differently, and added to or enhanced the direction of my work. It reaffirmed what I was doing right and expanded the possibility of where it can go.

The consideration shown by all. The ability to listen and share was encouraging.

What could have been different?

I'm very thankful for the change in direction and flexibility of the organizing committee. It really fostered dialogue and connection.

[They] might have built in the sharing circle earlier. But we need to move beyond this to develop deeper dialogue for change and key aspects of different types of learning, including academic, and dialogue on how to integrate this with community based knowledge.

I would have liked to have heard more about various kinds of service provision, policies, and research that are working.

What do you think should be the next steps from here?

As I was listening, I began to think about what tasks need to be completed so that there would be a way of showing people that their voices have been heard. It also gives people hope for change, which is so important.

On the educational level, we need to have an Aboriginal education forum that deals specifically with issues related to [such things as] retention, curriculum development, accreditation, community involvement, and distance education.

We need ongoing communication about what we are doing, and a place to share. Possibly a journal or newsletter.

Follow-up collaboration in a variety of areas. It does not just have to be this group. It could be in education, service delivery, or policy.

Continued dialogue both across and within groups (academics, government, First Nations).

What is critically important is to involve government policy makers and cabinet ministers.

Let's now focus on the successes and models—what is working—then focus on what gaps are yet to be filled. Also bring in the other service directors: child & youth care, foster parents, family support, community workers, school systems, and others.

Another gathering (perhaps next spring?) to achieve some consensus on priorities for action. Out of that will flow directions and action planning [several remarks to this effect].

Take action in our group.
Take action in our provinces.

Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare

Take action in schools/universities/Faculty of Social Work.
Take action in the communities.

Keep the dialogue going.

Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up!

PHASE THREE: THE PCWC IS BORN

Clearly, the tri-provincial effort no longer belonged only to the universities. Energized by the discussion group reports, experience as participants in the sharing circle, and review of the evaluations, all steering committee members agreed that a face-to-face meeting should be organized as soon as possible, and that the primary agenda should be to revisit our purpose together and determine next steps. In the interim, a symposium website was launched through the University of Regina, Social Policy Research Unit (<http://www.uregina.ca/spru>). Individuals attending the symposium were informed of its existence. The website contained information about the symposium, including a copy of the keynote speech and highlights from other presentations.³ As well, the site included links to other web pages relevant to Prairie child welfare.

The steering committee met in Calgary in March, 2002, this time hosted by Gayla Rogers, Dean of Social Work, University of Calgary. We were again privileged to have the services of Alan Shugg to help facilitate a vision and mission exercise. We were also privileged to have Deanna Greyeyes attend the meeting and to hear the comments she was unable to make as one of the final speakers on Day Two. Her observations related to issues of governance, the need for capacity building, opportunities for collaboration, and the imperative that the social work profession respond to the need for change.

Symposium participants had urged an early follow-up gathering but doing so immediately did not appear possible for reasons of resource limitations, time, and logistics. Committing ourselves to organizing a bi-annual symposium appeared more reasonable. A tentative plan was made to locate the next event at the University of Manitoba in the fall of 2003.

The group addressed the larger task of moving forward with a col-

laborative agenda, the challenge being to determine what form this might take and how to move it along. Discussions led to envisioning a consortium encompassing the three provincial governments, four university programs in social work, and, hopefully, the engagement of Aboriginal service deliverers across the three provinces. Renaming the newly constituted body the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium, the group prepared a draft vision and mission statement, and related goals and objectives (see Appendix). The mission statement affirms respect for the needs of Aboriginal communities in the delivery of child welfare services.

Three standing committees were struck to develop action plans and begin work on education and training, practice and service delivery, and research. Coordinators were assigned to each of the standing committees. The Chair of the steering committee (Sharon McKay) would serve as a central link for the three standing committees and the steering committee.

PROGRESS: 2002–2006

Undeterred by what continues to be an unfunded, somewhat loosely knit and flexible and evolving structure, members of the PCWC steering committee and standing committees have been actively at work. Two additional symposiums have been organized (2003 in Winnipeg, Manitoba and 2005 in Edmonton, Alberta), each attracting an even larger number of participants. Evaluations of these have been enthusiastic and supportive, a strong majority of participants calling for continued bi-annual events. The symposia have each featured powerful keynote speakers, compelling and informative workshops and paper presentations, and a variety of vehicles to encourage information exchange and facilitate dialogue among and between participants. Highlights of the symposiums have been featured on the Consortium website and in other forms, such as videotape and print (e.g., this book).

A charter has been developed as a basis for sharing information across the provincial ministries. Plans are currently underway for a winter 2007 inter-provincial and northern training forum involving lead ministry and First Nation child and family service trainers from Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories. It is

expected that this project will lead to a written document and further collaborative initiatives. A parallel forum to share information and consider collaborative initiatives across the four university social work programs is envisioned.

Research principles have been established, ideas have been shared, proposals have been written, and, thanks to the support of the Public Health Agency of Canada through the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, three major projects have been completed in the past year (“Determinants of Children with Disabilities [Including FASD] Coming into the Care of Mandated Child Welfare Agencies,” based in Manitoba; “Making Our Hearts Sing,” based in Alberta; and “Identity, Community and Resilience: The Transmission of Values Project,” based in Saskatchewan). In February, 2006 the Consortium co-sponsored a research and policy forum with the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare. A group of key researchers and policy-makers from across Canada attended the event, held in Regina, Saskatchewan. Information regarding these projects and the policy forum may be found on the PCWC and CECW websites: http://www.uregina.ca/spr/prairie_child.html and http://www.cecw-cepb.ca/files/file/en/PrairieChildWelfareResearchForum_Feb2006.pdf

Not to be overlooked, significant developments have included the welcoming of three new institutional members since 2001: the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (2002), the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the Métis Nations of Alberta (2005). Numerous individuals, organizations, and communities have participated in Consortium activities through attendance at one or more of the three symposiums and/or through involvement in one of the three major research projects. These projects have, in turn, led to a growing partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare (CECW), based at the University of Toronto. Grant funding for the 2006/07 fiscal year has been provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada through the CECW. This funding will support the planned training forum as well as a second phase of both the Manitoba and Alberta research projects. Infrastructure funding is an essential ingredient to the sustainability of the Consortium. The 2006/07 interim funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada has assisted the Consortium to strengthen its infrastructure and work towards assuring it continued viability and continuing development.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE NEEDS

The work of coordinating, maintaining, and nurturing the PCWC network is ongoing. The partnership literature speaks to the importance of having a "driver" to keep people connected and to move the agenda along. Thanks to the support of the University of Regina and the very fine teamwork of members, I have been privileged to play this role as chair of the Consortium steering committee since the inception of the PCWC. The literature fails to mention the equal importance of a driving spirit that keeps people energized and connected with one another over time. Undoubtedly this spirit evolves at least in part from the commitment and dedication of the individuals spearheading a network such as the PCWC. More may be needed, however. The triggering factor for the PCWC was without doubt the volte face incident that resulted in a complete change of program on Day Two of the 2001 symposium. This powerful experience fuelled the follow-up action described in Phase Three of the PCWC's development, ensuring the commitment of the founding bodies over the past six years. The majority of this developmental work has occurred through steering committee email correspondence and conference calls supplemented by one or two in-person meetings per year. The cost of conference calls has been shared on a rotating basis. Travel funds for in-person meetings have been made available by constituent members and research funds. As the Consortium membership grows, and the work becomes more complex, there is a need for more face-to-face meetings—both of the steering committee and the working committees. A clear operational structure needs to be designed. This is especially important to ensure effective communication processes and a transparent handling of funds that we anticipate we will be successful in procuring for ongoing development or research purposes.

Government and agency partnerships with universities have their own special quirks. Respect for academic freedom is paramount within the universities yet this can lead to inevitable school/agency tensions. Government and agency service deliverers need to know that academics will make genuine efforts to understand their issues and to work together with them, even though research findings may not sit well in some quarters. Protocols need to be developed to handle real and potential conflicts.

Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare

A significant challenge has been to more fully engage our Aboriginal partners, either as formal members of the PCWC or, if they so wish, in some form of associate membership (e.g., an independent structure with links to the PCWC). First Nations structures for the delivery of child and family services vary considerably within the three provinces, and much more needs to be done to fully engage this constituency across the Prairies and in the north in a meaningful way.

Continuity and engagement is an ongoing membership challenge. Organizational links are heavily dependent on individual representatives. However, individuals or their immediate superiors often change positions or retire, necessitating an assertive effort on the part of the PCWC to encourage the organization to continue its involvement. This entails making personal contact with senior staff members who may or may not be cognizant of the work of the Consortium, of prior commitments of the organization, and of the high value placed on their continued involvement. During the course of the six years that the PCWC has existed, several government officials, university administrators, and Aboriginal leaders supportive of the partnership have left their positions for various reasons. Fortunately, through the concerted efforts of steering committee members, continuity has been maintained. Nevertheless, this is a constant concern.

Child welfare is a well-known political and emotional minefield that reverberates throughout many levels of the system and in the eyes of the general public. Collaborative work has had its challenges but these have not created significant barriers to the development of the Consortium. Relationships among the members have consistently been marked by respect for the roles played and the constraints limiting sector representatives. Individuals serving on the Consortium steering committee and working groups hold each other in high regard. Our collegial working relationships have been marked by an assured confidence that we can rely on one another to carry through with commitments, and that these will be done well. In relation to the engagement of key players across provincial and institutional boundaries, this steady confidence that people can rely upon one another is axiomatic.

The partnership that has evolved is in part the consequence of established working relationships within and across provincial

boundaries, a history of cooperation and collaboration pre-existing on the Prairies and in the north, and an acknowledged deep sense of responsibility and urgency related to the imperative to respond more sensitively and effectively to the needs of children and families who come in contact with the child welfare system.

Solid relationships and strong commitment to working together, however, may not be enough to hold together a voluntary group that is handicapped by lack of funding and an underlying infrastructure. Consortium processes have advanced considerably in the past few months through the hiring of a coordinator, ably served by Shelley Thomas Prokop, former First Nations University of Canada faculty member and co-investigator of the Saskatchewan PCWC research project. The Consortium is especially grateful to the Public Health Agency of Canada and the CECW for advancing the funds that made this hiring possible. If the work done to date is to continue to flourish and advance, funds to hire personnel will need to be found on a more permanent basis. The Consortium has been regularly engaged in strategic planning processes that have been charting its' future direction and addressing issues of funding for its' sustainability and undertaking innovative new initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Steering committee members are indebted to our colleagues in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba—educators, government personnel, and Aboriginal service delivery people—for their encouragement, involvement, and significant contributions to the PCWC initiative. The Consortium has attracted national attention resulting in a much valued partnership with the CECW and through that Centre, with the Public Health Agency of Canada. This partnership has made the Consortium's research and policy development initiatives possible.

We especially wish to acknowledge the participants in the November, 2001 Child and Family Symposium, organized by the members of the PCWC. Participant contributions to the symposium led to the crisis event that has been described. Responding to this event led to a profoundly rich and compelling dialogue—and "courageous" conversation between individuals and groups that has contin-

ued for over six years, albeit in different forms. This very human process has been humbling, inspiring, energizing, and hopeful. While history, demographics, and geography naturally lead to a major emphasis of all of our work on the needs of Aboriginal children and youth, their families, and communities, the lessons learned have implications for all children and youth in our child welfare systems. We are conscious of this, and dedicate our activities to all those who are affected by policy, practice, and service delivery in this part of the country. Our hope is that our experience will encourage others to launch similar partnerships in other parts of Canada.

ENDNOTES

1. Participants at the December 1999 meeting included Sharon McKay, then dean of Social Work, and Drs. George Maslany and Daniel Salhani University of Regina; George Inkster, then director, School of Indian Social Work, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College; Dr. Gayla Rogers, Dean of Social Work, and Dr. Jean Lafrance, University of Calgary; Dr. Don Fuchs, then dean of Social Work, University of Manitoba.

2. The 2001 symposium steering committee members were:

Saskatchewan

Sharon McKay (Planning Committee Chair)

Jon Sealy, Laurie Gilchrist, Associate Professor, SIFC

Richard Hazel, Executive Director, Family and Youth Services Division, Saskatchewan Social Services

Janet Farnell, Senior Program Consultant, Child Protection, Saskatchewan Social Services

Archie Laroque, Coordinator of Aboriginal Policy, Saskatchewan Social Services

Thelma Musqua, Yorkton Tribal Council, Indian Child and Family Services

Alberta

Gayla Rogers, Dean of Social Work, University of Calgary

Jean Lafrance, Edmonton Division Head, University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work

L.M. (Molly) Turner, Director, Human Resources, Alberta Children's Services

Betty Deane, Manager, Strategic Human Resource Initiatives, Alberta Children's Services

Manitoba

Don Fuchs, Dean of Social Work, University of Manitoba

Alexandra Wright, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work,
University of Manitoba

Gwen Gosek, Distance Education Coordinator, Faculty of Social
Work, University of Manitoba

Carolyn Loeppky, Senior Associate, Family Services and
Housing, Government of Manitoba

Dennis Schellenberg, Executive Director, Manitoba Child
Protection Support Services

3. These documents have since been replaced by more current information.

APPENDIX

Prairie Child Welfare Consortium

Vision

Child welfare services in the Prairie provinces meet the needs of the children, families, and communities they support.

Mission

Build capacity, at different levels of all systems that support children, families, and communities in the Prairie provinces, while ensuring respect for the needs of Aboriginal communities in the delivery of child welfare services.

The PCWC works to influence, advocate and change education, training, research, policy and practice/service delivery through collaboration, innovation and partnering.

The PCWC will seek affiliation with other national child welfare bodies for joint initiatives, which would further the PCWC mission and present a Prairie perspective at the national level.

Strategic goals

Education and training

- Approach education and training as a continuum, ensuring appropriate linkages between the education received and the training provided and recognizing the specialized focus in each domain.
 - o Develop processes to ensure that both training and formal education are more effectively integrated with the needs of the employer.
 - o Create better linkages between formal education and the orientation, and ongoing training, of professional.
 - o Build linkages, as appropriate, between education, training and other related initiatives.
- Promote educational and training curriculum that works toward the improved delivery of child and family services.
- Develop a collaborative approach for the development and sharing of curriculum for training and education to maximize the ability to take advantage of government, agencies, and educational institutions.
- Expand the knowledge and skill development of learners in the areas of:
 - o advocacy on behalf of clients within government and other service systems;
 - o managing in an environment of constantly changing paradigms; and
 - o working effectively within the employer's system.
- Enable cross-fertilization through mentorship, cross-appointments, secondments, inter-provincial exchanges.
- Develop opportunities for graduate students as resources for the various objectives of the Consortium.

Research

- Develop a prioritized research agenda that:
 - o poses researchable questions as a collective; thereby improving opportunities for research funding;
 - o links new research to current research activities, e.g., longitudinal studies;
 - o ensures opportunities for consumer and service provider input and participation; and
 - o develops strategies for the application of research.
- Develop a strategy to support skill transfer in research.
- Determine the need for an ethics review process with credibility and feasibility; establish an inter-provincial research protocol.
- Develop/enable a synergy of resources for research to support:
 - o the collaboration of academics and policy developers; and
 - o the dissemination of research results.
- Foster the sharing of information (e.g., website).
- Promote research that works toward capacity-building in the delivery of child and family services.

Policies

- Develop a strategy to ensure input and influence is provided for the analysis, evaluation, and development of policy, including implementation, at all levels.
- Apply a child friendly policy lens focussed on the interests and rights of children, families, and communities.
- Use policy issues to frame research.

Practice/service delivery

- Share practice and delivery models to learn about what works, what does not work, and what has been learned

Putting a Human Face on Child Welfare

(rural/urban/Aboriginal).

- Develop/implement a collaborative model for innovative research, examination of practice issues, and development of practice/service delivery.
- Collect data, develop research questions, and exchange experiences to practically support best practices and evidence-based practice.
- Support practitioners in their advocacy role.